

Neither Here nor There

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ARRIVAL

The blue of the Caribbean is simultaneously familiar and heartbreaking to me. I always hope for a window seat so I can watch the way the dirty greens from the Gulf of Mexico curl into the turquoise of my sea. The air often shifts in the plane around this time. My family says I'm crazy, that the regulated air in planes eliminates the possibility of smelling the salty brine wafting off of the waves hundreds of feet in the air, but I smell it. I feel how the humidity deposits the salt onto the tips of my hair, how the warmth immediately ignites my sweat. It tastes like home.

Suffocating doesn't even begin to describe the heat that day. I knew as soon as I stepped off of the plane.

The baggage claim in the capital airport is across from a wall of floor length windows. I've spent my life thinking about those windows and the anticipation they both contain and protect passengers from. Some trips I eagerly search for familiar faces before fetching my luggage; other trips I hide. I didn't know what to do this time so I quickly grabbed my bags and tried to swallow the growing lump in my throat before stepping out to meet my grandparents. The air was so suffocating, I cried before making it outside.

Lourdes, the family friend (grandpa's unofficial caretaker), was there with them. (Red Flag). My grandma's eyes were sunken in, her smile seemed forced, she looked smaller. (Red Flag). I could wrap my arm completely around my grandpa when I hugged him. (Red Flag).

It was so fucking hot I couldn't breathe.

We decided to go to Bebo's to eat lunch before heading home. In Puerto Rico, any restaurant described as "criolla/o" serves traditional cuisine. Puerto Ricans love to go out and eat food they could make at home. I'm guilty of that. My grandpa didn't order his own food this time. He stuttered through our conversations and kept grabbing his head as if doing so would help him to remember. He threw a small fit on our way out, nothing out of the ordinary for him. However, when we got in the car to leave, my grandma took off before my grandpa was able to completely get into the car. She didn't realize he hadn't gotten in yet, he looked upset, I screamed. When did they stop noticing each other?

I had never felt attacked by my own island before. I had never felt the superstitious “forces” my mother always talked about, the ones that come out and warn people of the truth. We got home and everything looked exactly as I had left it the summer before. The wind-chimes slowly sang as my grandpa’s first tantrum started; an all-consuming, impressive spectacle. He lashed out over something trivial and my grandma shrunk, unwaveringly accepting his assault.

That was the first night we fought. The tantrums persisted multiple times a day, everyday without fault. His humanity slipped along with his memory. His eyes would glaze over, pupils dilated, as he wrestled with his own misunderstandings of the spaces around him. Each episode followed by childlike apologies, kisses, and hugs.

“I’m sorry, you know I don’t mean the things I say. I love you.”

Assaults with no defense and my grandmother had been fielding it all on her own. She was prescribed antidepressants and anti-anxiety medication as a temporary solution.

“I’M SICK TOO, PEPE! CAN’T YOU SEE THAT I’M ALSO DYING!?”

Together we traveled across the island, visiting museums and walking on beaches as I tried to divert my grandpa’s anger and resentment away from my grandma; as I tried to divert my grandma’s anger and resentment away from my grandpa.

NOTES FROM ME TO YOU

Sunday, July 3, 2016

Cuando mis hijos estaban en la universidad, tuve que buscarme un part-time con Pablo Garay haciendo 'escrines' porque estabamos en una etapa donde ganábamos poco y los tres hijos estaban en la universidad y no me daba el dinero para resolver. Pablo Garay fue el único que me quiso dar un trabajo part-time. Cuando salieron Pepo y Aixa de la universidad, me deje.

Estudie en un cursito de hojalatería sanado los problemas de cantasitos que tenían los carros y la pintura también.

Acepte un trabajo con AmWay pero no vendí un carajo nunca. Vendían jabón, desodorante, etc. Era una compañía pirámide de esas.

En la fabrica de la Ford empece ganado 72 centavos por hora.

Abuelo's Lesson:

Los cuentos de Abelardo

- *despedida de duelo = eulogy*
- *a Don Abelardo le pagaban como era tan folklórico*

Bagazo = caña despues de que la masticas y le sacas el jugo

La zafra y el tiempo muerto de la caña:

Durante la zafra, había trabajo dos veces al año:

- *siembra*
- *procesar y cortar en la central*

**Bosses were American assholes that only gave work to young, healthy men and not to those who needed it.*

En Puerto Rico la marijuana se usaba para todas las enfermedades pero los farmacéuticos pelearon para serla ilegal. En el país se masticaba.

July 6, 2016

Yesterday, an artist painted over the PR flag in black. The flag is painted on a door and is part of a larger piece that is well known in PR. Every time tourists come who know about it, they HAVE to stop to take a picture. Yesterday, the island was outraged by this “act of vandalism” only to fall silent when the artist of the original piece stepped forward as the “vandal.” She painted the flag in defiance because PR is fucked and no one fucking cares.

It's hot and I'm annoyed so I came outside to sit on the porch. I had a studio visit with a well known PR artist named Samuel Lind. My grandpa came along with Lourdes. Overall it was a great experience but near the end grandpa started feeling lightheaded so I rushed him out.

I don't know what else to say. I feel like shit for some reason.

July ?, 2016

Cuando estaba en cama por lo de la pierna yo tenia los guantes puestos con la doctora y ella lo noto. Entro a mi cuarto y no hice nada mas que abrir la boca cuando me dijo, "Mira! Ni tu hija allá fuera o Obama va a poder decirme que te de de alta así que hazme el favor y te me aquietas." Y yo le dije, "Seguro, doctora,"

Después de eso le hice una maldad. Ella llego toda "esmoruzada" y yo le pregunte "Oye doctora, tu estabas guiando con la cabeza fuera de la ventana?" "No, porque?" "Porque estas mas esmoruzada!" Jajaja. A ella no le gusto eso. Mas nunca la moleste.

July 12, 2016

I went with my grandma to her doctor's appointment in San Juan. They were testing her carotid artery to see how clogged it is since she had triple bypass surgery last year. Her appointment was at 12:00PM but the medical system is so fucked in PR it took an hour and a half before the doctor bothered to see her. 30 minutes for the procedure and another hour to hear the results. The doctor had walked in at 11:30AM with a bag full of food for the entire office. The hour and a half that we waited for the procedure was because the entire office decided to take their lunch. Mind you, my grandma's appointment was at 12PM. Fine, but to walk past and show *why* you were late? Fuck you and your piece of shit secretary.

The power in the entire hospital went out while we waited. What kind of shit is actually happening in these hospitals? My mom had to wait with her another day for eight hours. For one appointment. Fuck that.

On another note, grandpa's having tantrums three times a day. Alzheimer's is a bitch. We're watching "Wheel of Fortune" like we always do at 7PM. He said he's loved this show for 33 years.

*The Republican and Democratic parties are fighting over the morality of aerially spraying pesticides to kill the mosquitoes carrying the Zika virus in PR. Of course, the debate is bullshit. We all know it will be done. The mosquitoes were brought here by the U.S. to be tested on Puerto Ricans and the pesticide will be tested here too. Do you have any doubt still that we're a colony?

COLONIA

It feels good to see a woman of color win an episode of "Wheel of Fortune." She won money, a car, and a trip to Alaska.

July 13, 2016

Donde nacistes?

En Fajardo. Mi hermana y hermano en Cayey porque mi mama era enfermera y consiguió trabajo en Cayey. Se caso con Papi y los tuvo. Luego Papi consiguió trabajo en transportación en la base y se mudaron 4 años después de yo nacer. Vivimos en muchas casa porque Mami siempre buscaba alquiler mas baratos. Compramos una casa en las parcelas de Ceiba por \$300. Cuando entra a la escuela yo iba a pie caminando por la calle. Me daban 2 centavos para la escuela. Con eso compraba un limber y un canto de pan y con eso me comía los sandwiches de limber. Todo el mundo se reían de mi pero a mi me gustaba mucho. Como fue tu escuela?

La escuela para mi fue buena pero desde bien joven me olvide de la maestra de primero pero me enchule de la de tercero. Salí de tercero y la maestra me brinco para quinto porque ella era la maestra. Juanita Maldonado fue la que mas me enseñó y mas me protegía. Yo la amaba mucho , me trato bien, y me enseñó mucho. Por ahí seguí. En séptimo aprendí a jugar ping pong en educación física. Lloyd y yo buscamos dos drones y una tableta para poder jugar en casa pero no teníamos una malla. Pase a octavo y noveno jugando ping pong. Cuando me gradué de noveno, mis padres no quisieron que me quedara en Ceiba so me mandaron a la High de Fajardo. No confiaron en los maestros de la high de Ceiba. Ese año empecé la high en Ceiba por primera vez fui a la high en Fajardo. Bregué bien pero siempre tuve problemas con las maestra porque me quedaba en el almuerzo jugando ping pong. Siempre tuve buenas notas. Yo quería ser mecánico de carros. Se lo dije a mis padres y me dijeron que no, que me tenía que ir a la uni. Fui, y me hice maestro de ingles. Fui maestro de ingles tres años nada mas porque no me pagaban suficiente so me fui para una fabrica. La de la Ford. Estaba ganando 72 centavos a la hora. Me dijeron loco pero yo seguí. Me siguieron subiendo el sueldo. me fui de ahí ganándome \$11/hr. Hice ahorros como el diablo por mi cuenta porque Elisa no quería ahorrar. Yo cojea prestamos de la fabrica y lo pagaba semanal. Trabaje 32 años en la fabrica. Cumplí los 55 cuando me retire. Me dijeron loco ahí también. Tenia chavos en el banco y tenia pension.

También me metí a la guardia nacional. Tenia 18 años y me retire después de 21 años de servicio. Ellos me dieron la pension.

Por la fabrica fui a los estados unidos pero por la guardia también. Fui a Louisiana, Carolina del Norte, Carolina del Sur, Virginia, y Michigan. La guardia iba a hacer los trabajos que la guardia americana no quería hacer. Nosotros le metíamos mano a lo que sea y lo hacíamos bien. Yo me divertí.

Una vez fui a Detroit cuando me conocieron y les enseñe lo que sabia, me hicieron una oferta que Elisa me rechazo. Yo me ganaba \$7 y me ofrecieron \$20. Ell ano quería criar a los hijos en los estados unidos.

Yo trabaje en la caña antes de cumplir los 17 .Yo tenia que ponerme una bolsa pesa en la falda lleno de abono. Tuve que echarle abono a toda la caña. A las 4 horas estuve rabioso. Después de ese día decidí no volver. Le dije que no quería trabajara mas. Estaba demasiado cansado. Y me fui. Probe que yo no estaba de trabajo fuerte. Mas nunca quise saber de la caña pero hubo mucha gente que vivía de la caña. El trabajo era mal pago pero todo era mal pago.

Entonces ya haciendo maestro mi primer trabajo fue en un campo de Luquillo. En esa escuela disfrute mucho. Sentía que estaba haciendo el trabajo bien. Mi jefa era preciosa y una mujer maravillosa. Al otro año nadie me llamada de Luquillo. Me llamaron de Ceiba a trabajar en el barrio del Saco. Ahi sufrí mucho. Habían muchos brutos y no muchos aplicados. Pero, termine el año. No me recuerdo de nadie ahi. Nadie fue especial para mi. Luego, el tercer año, llamaron a dar clase en octavo en Ceiba. Ese año me saco de carrera porque los nenes eran demasiados. Las nenas se enamoraron de me. Me sentía inseguro porque las muchachas eran lindas y cariñosas y me tiraban. Ese año ya me iba a casar y decidí que no volvía. Pero me llaman de Las Croabas y como era en Fajardo me vine y empecé a trabajar. Era la mismo. En Las Croabas habían un montón de ingreidos y la directora no me caía bien. A lost tres meses encontré el trabajo en la Ford.

En la Ford estaba contento porque estaba trabajando con mecánica al principio. Ahi trabaje bastante feliz. Tuve tropiezos con mis jefes pero los vencí. Como los jefes no tienen que tener educación o ser chevere, jodían mucho. Le dije “me estas jodiendo mucho, vamos pa la oficina pa yo quejarme con el gerente” pero no se atrevió. Después me pusieron a ayudar los que hacían el labor de la maquina. Yo arreglaba el problema (tech). Ahi me mandaron a los estados unidos par de veces para aprender mas. Por un momento mi trabajo era en oficina ganando \$14. Tenia que inspectar las maquinas y decir si tenia problemas para que otro mecánico lo arreglaba. Tenia que reportar a el jefe que me jodía entonces fue mi turno joderlo a el. Ahi termine. Nadie era jefe mío.

Cuando yo era muchacho, yo era un pollito.

Como conocistes a abuela?

Ella era hermana de la novia de Junior (Flor) pero antes de ella tuve como 800 novias jajaja.

Today he told me that he regrets marrying my grandma so we had to stop the interview once I started asking about her.

Fig. 1 Handmade transparency for the projection component of the installation.



RETURN

Generational immigrants, myself included, often envision their motherland exactly as they left it. Leaving the country as a child made it so that I was able to trap memories of what I considered to be a more beautiful Puerto Rico; a utopian Puerto Rico. Every summer I returned, I was disappointed to find that some things had inevitably changed. The neighbors grew older, store fronts closed and new ones opened, and capitalism ran rampant. Every year the island seemed to lose more of the patina I remembered. During the days at my grandparents, I obsessively worked to collect visual information while my nights were fed with history lessons and folks songs from the record player. My summers in Puerto Rico cancelled my American identity after the first week of every visit. One week to stumble through the Spanglish and then it was as if I'd never left.

“How do you say esto?”

“No, ask me in Spanish.”

“Como se dice esto?”

“How do you say this?”

“Te dije que en ingles no!”

The nostalgia was impossible to ignore. Repetition became key to understanding my two worlds and the space between them. The rest of the year was spent feverishly clinging to the stories my grandparents told us through the phone.

“How do you say this?”

“Repítelo en español.”

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. I was neither here nor there. I will never be here or there.

I grow farther from my Puerto Rico at the same rate my grandfather's memory deteriorates. Every shriveling synapse takes with it a page from my history book, the history of my elders. I carve and stamp. carve and stamp. carve and stamp it onto vellum before it disappears.

CONCLUSION and INSTALLATION

My grandfather's Alzheimer's is paralyzing, terrifying, and unpredictable. My motherland's state of affairs hinges on a similar premise. Though unstable, both beings generously offer beauty and serve as a reminder of the ephemerality of the world, the mind, and material. Structure is imposed on a colony, an Alzheimer's patient, and an industrial roll of vellum but within the grid, deviations often occur.



Fig. 2 Installation shot of the army of printed pigeons.



Fig. 3 Projector as human accompanied by light.



Fig. 4 Daytime army.



Fig 5. Pigeons flying up, pigeons flying down.



Fig 6. Projector as enlightened human, enlightening the army.



Fig. 7 Nighttime army.

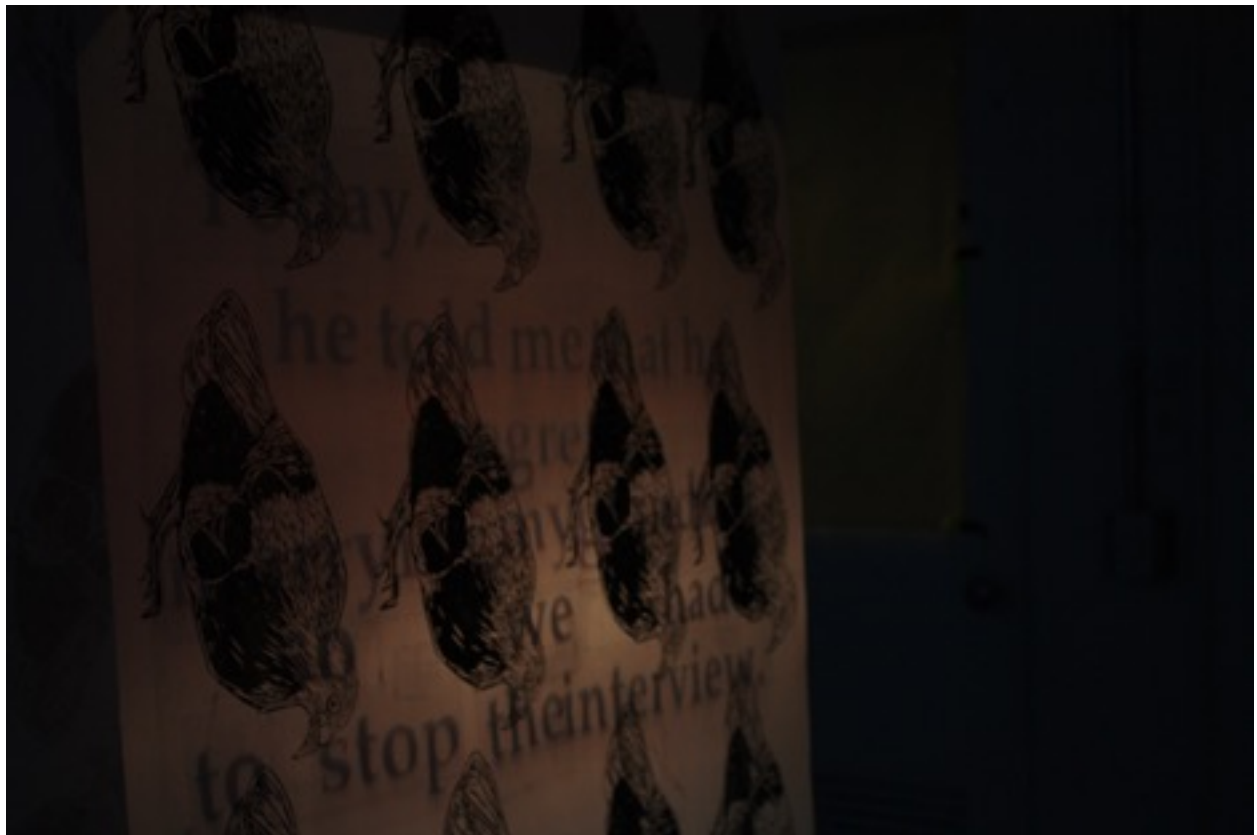


Fig. 8 Nighttime Army, 2.



Fig. 9 Installed human projection.

21 MOMENTS WITH ALZHEIMER'S



Fig. 10 Grandpa and his medicine.



Fig. 11 Grandpa fixing the couch.



Fig. 12 Grandma helping grandpa fix the couch.



Fig. 13 Grandpa getting ready to spray ants with soapy water.



Fig. 14 Grandpa pulling the banana plants out.



Fig. 15 Grandpa gardening.



Fig. 16 Grandma's laundry lines.



Fig. 17 Grandpa's tools.



Fig. 18 Baby me.



Fig. 19 We buy lobster salad and tostones from this man's house.



Fig. 20 Grandma at the museum of art.



Fig. 21 Grandma helping grandpa up.



Fig. 22 Grandma and Lourdes.



Fig. 23 Grandpa at the artist's house/studio.



Fig. 24 We went to a sunflower farm together.



Fig. 25 Flamboyant on the golf course.



Fig. 24 Iguana on the golf course.



Fig. 25 Grandpa golfing.

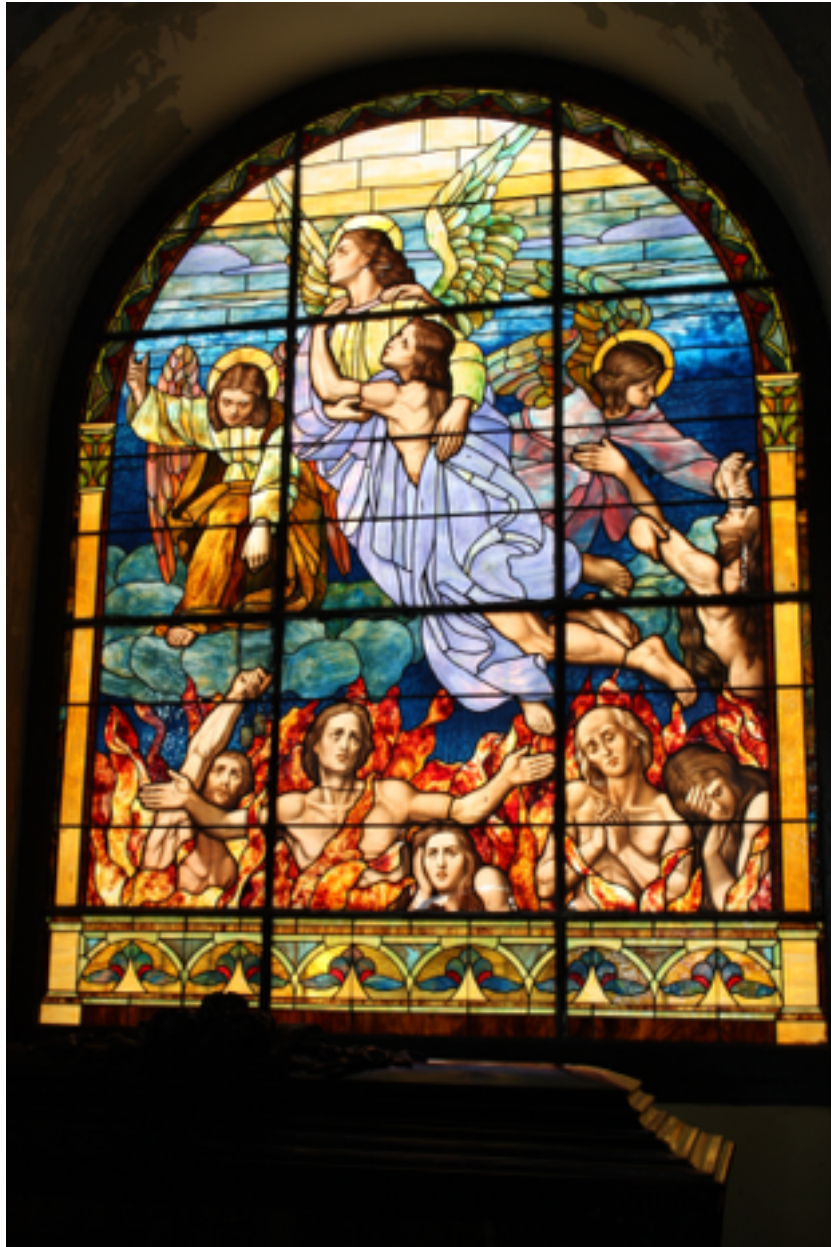


Fig. 26 Stained glass in a cathedral in San Juan.



Fig. 27 Coconut monkeys.



Fig. 28 The bathroom I grew up in.

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To my grandparents for allowing me to document some of the difficulty of living with Alzheimer's, for keeping a smile on my face and spoiling me when I knew how exhausted you really were, for loving me unconditionally. You may never see this paper. I love you.